

The CLAN CALL

By Hapsburg Liebe

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

scrambling sycamores, to a point within seventy yards of the office and supplies building. Then they made a dash across the open space, and Ben Littleford, with one arm bound up in a well-stained blue bandana, opened the door for them.

"Who else is hurt?" panted Dale. "Little Tom," answered Littleford. "Saul, Little Tom, he got a bullet under the shoulder. Saul, he got one in the night nigh the same place. They've riddled the whole lotter side of the house to splinters. They're coming in for you."

"They'll get all they want of me," Dale growled.

He turned and ran up the rough stairway, and Ben Littleford and the others followed close upon his heels. At the front and side windows, anything they had been able to find that would stop a bullet, knelt Littleford with rifles in their hands, carefully watching for a human target to appear on the mountainside above. Saul and Little Tom lay in a corner, where they were fairly safe from the bullets. Hayes had bound up their wounds as well as he could with the material at hand. They were weak, white and helpless and suffering, but still full of the old Littleford fighting spirit.

Dale seized his Winchester and shot of cartridges from the hands of the man who had brought them to him, and turned to the others. A bullet crashed through the wall and struck the floor at his foot; he paid no attention to it.

"Listen to me, boys," Dale was shouting his cartridge-belt with rapid, steady fingers. "From where they are looking, the Balls and Turners can hardly see the lower story of this building. We'll go downstairs, open the front door, and run to the edge of the laurels at the foot of the mountain. Then we'll turn to the right, make a wide detour, and get above the Ball outfit; we'll be fighting down hill instead of uphill. Get me? Are you all ready?"

"Those men, they were ready."

They reached the thick undergrowth without being seen by the enemy. While the Balls and Turners stood more or less aimlessly at the building, drank white whisky and smoked drunkenly for the surrender to Dale, Bill Dale and his men were making their way steadily in a wide half-circle up the side of Moreland's mountain.

Half an hour after they had left the office building, Dale had stationed his men, deployed as a line of skirmishers, behind sheltering trees some two hundred feet above the Balls and their kinsmen.

John Moreland, Ben Littleford and Bill Dale were not far apart. "It's a shame to do it," said Dale. "I swear, we can't shoot men in the back like this."

John Moreland, twisted his mouth into a queer smile of contempt, and said to Ben Littleford. They knew, far better than their leader, the ways of these people without a principle. The Balls and Turners wouldn't hesitate to shoot them in the back!

"Well," John Moreland replied, and it was almost a sneer, "ye might go down there and give 'em some candy, and kiss 'em, and ax 'em won't they please surrender!"

Ben leaped around his tree, a great grinning chestnut, and called boldly: "You've got a chance to surrender

now—and you'd certainly better take it quick!"

One of those below yelled surprisedly: "Who're you?" Then they all whipped to the other side of their sheltering timber.

The answer came at once: "I'm Bill Dale, and I'm peeved! You're at the mercy of the finest hill clan that ever looked along rifle barrels; will you surrender, or fight it out?"

"You said it—we'll fight it out!" cried a burly cousin of Black Adam Ball, deceased.

"You're on!" growled Bill Dale, slipping his rifle out beside the tree. "Give 'em h—l, boys!"

He was unused to this sort of thing, and he was incautious. He showed a little too much of himself—there was a sudden keen report from below, and a bullet hole appeared in the rim of his hat! John Moreland fired the next shot, and he broke the right arm of the man who had just fired at Bill Dale. This opened the battle in earnest.

Soon the thunder of the many rifles became almost a steady roar. The air was filled with the pungent odor of burning powder. Bill Dale emptied the magazine of his repeater, and sank behind the big chestnut to fill it again with cartridges from his belt. Bullets now whined on both sides of him; they cut greenish white furrows in the bark of both sides of the tree, and knocked up little spurts of black earth to his right and to his left; they cut off twigs within an arm's reach of him. A dozen Balls were now firing at him, seeking to avenge the death of their kinsman, the Goliath. John Moreland's strong voice came to him through the din and roar: "Don't show no part o' yourself now, Bill; ef ye do, ye'll shore be hit!"

Dale fired again, pumped a fresh cartridge into the chamber of his rifle and slipped another into the magazine, and arose behind the chestnut.

"Down, Bill!" cried John Moreland. If Dale heard, he gave no sign of it. He fired four shots rapidly, and before the wind had carried away the blinding smoke he was behind another tree and shooting toward the Balls again. Soon there came a short, loud peal of laughter from his left; he turned his head and saw Ben Littleford taking a careful aim at a long angle toward the side of a boulder. Then Littleford fired, and a puff of stone dust showed that his bullet had gone true to its mark.

"What's that for?" demanded Dale. "We haven't any ammunition to throw away!"

"Why, Bill," replied Littleford, "didn't ye never bounce a bullet off a rock and make it go toward a man behind a tree?"

It lasted hotly for two hours, but the casualties were comparatively few, because there was so much cover available. From the beginning the Balls and the Turners had the worst of it, which was due to uphill shooting, white whisky, and lack of the iron that makes real fighting men. The cartridges of those below were giving out; they had fired too many shots needlessly.

"It's about time to rush them," Dale said to John Moreland, who had crept up beside him.

"Just give the word," Moreland nodded.

A few minutes later, Bill Dale sent the wings of his line down the mountainside, forming a half-circle of his force once more; then the whole line rushed, surrounded the enemy and called for a surrender.

But the Balls and their kinsmen wouldn't give in yet. They left their cover and started to run, found themselves facing Morelands and Littleford in every direction, clubbed their rifles and fought. It was not true courage that prompted them to offer resistance; it was utter desperation; they had never been givers of mercy, therefore they did not expect mercy. Dale's men forebore to fire upon them, which was at Dale's command, and met them with clubbed rifles. The woodland rang with the sound of wood and steel crashing against wood and steel. Everywhere there were groans and threats and curses from the losing side, victorious cries and further demands for a surrender from the winners.

Bill Dale, ever a lover of fair combat, threw down his repeater to grapple with a big North Carolinian whose clubbed weapon had been knocked from his hands. The two fell and rolled down the mountainside, locked in each other's arms.

And then one of the Balls struck Bill Dale across the head with the butt of his empty gun, and Bill Dale slackened his arms and lay as one dead.

He was lying under cover in a hand-carved black walnut fourposter, and it was night, when he opened his eyes again. Above him he saw the bearded faces of Ben Littleford and John Moreland, and they looked haggard and anxious in the oil lamp's yellow light. Suddenly Moreland spoke: "Dead—nothin'!" jubilantly. "Look, Ben; he's done come to! Ye couldn't put him in a cannon and shoot him ag'inst a cliff and kill him, Ben! I hope ye're a-feelin' all right, Bill, shore."

Dale realized everything quite clearly. He put a hand to his head; there was a wet cloth lying over the swollen place. "He shore give ye a buster of a lick," drawled a voice that Dale instantly recognized as that of his worshiper, By Heck. "Danged ef Cale Moreland didn't nigh it beat him to death, Bill!"

Many men crowded to the bedside and smiled at him, and he smiled back at them. Soon he asked: "Did you capture the outfit?"

"Did you capture the outfit?"

"Every durned one of 'em," answered John Moreland. "They're all shet up tight in the downstairs o' the office buildin', under gyard. The ain't but one of 'em plumb teetotally dead, fo' a wonder; but the's a whole passel of 'em hurt. I've done sent Luke to town on hossback, after a doctor fo' you and Saul and Little Tom; and he can tend to them crippled Balls, too, I reckon, ef you think it's best. What're we a-goin' to do with them fellers, Bill?"

"We're going to take them to the Cartersville jail," Dale answered promptly.

"I had a different plan 'an that planned out, John," said By Heck, winking at Ben Littleford. "I had it planned out to hang 'em all on a big green hemlock as a Christmas tree fo' Bill! Some devilish rough Christmas eve ye're a-havin', Bill, old boy, ain't it?"

"Rather," smiled Dale. He closed his eyes. His head ached, and he was somehow very tired.

Within the hour he went to sleep, and when he awoke it was daylight on Christmas morning. Ben Littleford, half dressed, was stirring the coals to life in the wide-mouthed stone fireplace. Dale felt better than he had expected to feel; he greeted Littleford with the compliments of the season, arose and dressed himself.

Littleford had just gone with a handful of kindling wood toward the kitchen, when there was a low, light tapping at the outside door of Bill Dale's room. Dale arose from his sheepskin-lined rocker before the cheery log fire, went to the door and opened it. Before him stood a slim, barefoot boy in the poorest of rags; in the pitifully slender arms there was something wrapped rather loosely in crumpled brown paper. Dale did not remember having seen the lad before, but he knew it was no Littleford.

"Come in, son," he invited cordially—"come in and warm yourself. My goodness alive, it's too cold to go barefooted like that! Haven't you any shoes, son?"

"Shoes?" muttered the boy, queerly. "Shoes?"

He was shivering from the cold. His thin face looked pinched and blue, his eyes big and hollow. Dale stooped, picked him up bodily, carried him to the old rocker he had just vacated, and put him into it with hands as gentle as any woman's.

"H—l," began the boy, staring hard—"what—"

"Now stick your feet out and warm them, son—that's it," and Dale chafed the poor little, dirty, half-frozen feet and legs.

"Son," he went on after a moment, his heart throbbing out of sheer pity, "you go to the commissary clerk and tell him to dress you up like the crown prince of England, if he's got it, and charge the same to the account of Bill Dale. It will be my Christmas gift to you, little boy. What's your name?"

The lad turned his surprised black eyes upon the face of the big and sun-browned man.

"Are you Bill Dale?"

"Yes."

That which the boy said next struck



"So you're Bill Dale. Well, D— My Soul!"

the big and sunbrowned man with all the force of a bullet.

"So you're Bill Dale. Well, D— my soul!"

"Don't, buddy, don't!"

The boy went on: "My name, it's Henery. I come here with a Christmas gif' fo' you." He pointed a dirty forefinger toward the bundle in his lap. "But you ain't a-goin' to git it now."

"Why?" Dale asked smilingly. "Why? Shoes—'at's why. H—l, did I ever have any shoes afore? Barefooted as a rabbit. That's me. Barefooted as a d—n rabbit!"

"Son," protested Bill Dale, "you're entirely too small to swear. You mustn't do it, y'know."

"Yes," quickly, "I'm small, I'm small to my age. I'm done twelve year old. I've been measured fo' the go-backs."

"Measured for the go-backs," laughed Dale, "what's that?"

"Why," soberly, "when ye grow liller 'stid o' bigger, ye've got the go-backs. Maw, she measured me with a yarn string out o' a stocking which had been wore by a woman seventy-seven-year old, and 'en she wrapped the yarn string around the door-hinge.

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TO BE CONTINUED

Tom Slaughter, the notorious bank robber and murderer, is again heard from. He was on the penal farm, near Little Rock Ark. Some one from the outside slipped him a repeating rifle. He went to a window and shot and killed one man and fatally wounded two other guards. Slaughter was given the rifle last Sunday week. After shooting the men mentioned above, he went to another window, shot and killed another man. He then made a rush for the open, but was stopped by a lifer. He is wanted in Barren county for robbing the Cave City Bank.

The movement of grain bars and thus prevent America from getting her share. It is very large and as increasing. Europe is again in the market for American grain. And if Europe buys grain, Europe will want other American products. Canada, by the way, is planning to reduce her tariff so as to get all the advantages possible from an improved buying power in Europe. And right at this moment the United States Congress is planning to put up the tariff disaster,—Louisville Post.



"Give 'Em H—l, Boys!"